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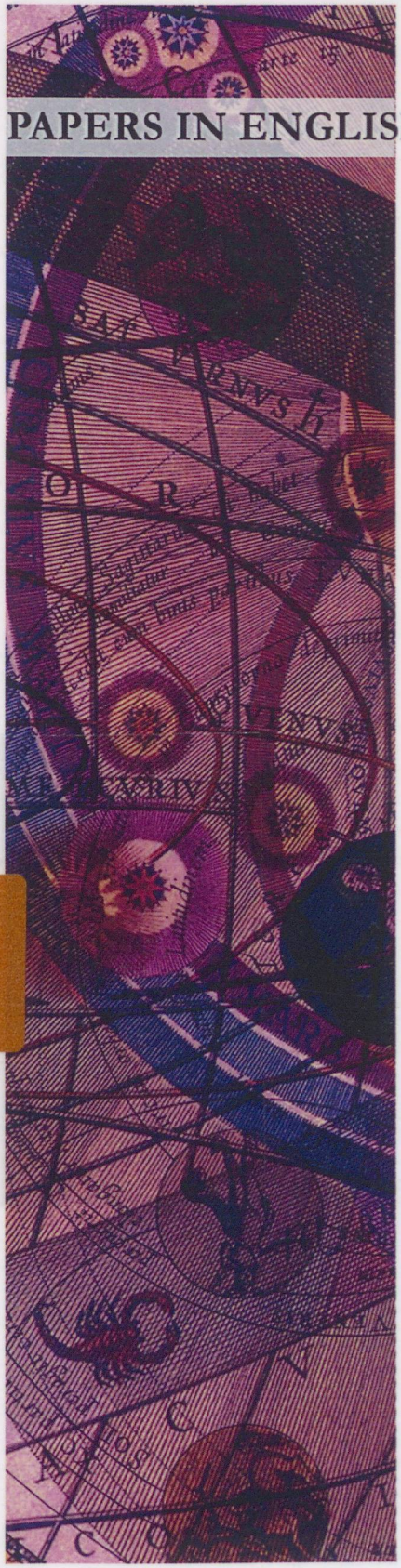

THE ICONOLOGY OF LAW AND ORDER

(Legal and Cosmic)

Edited by
ANNA KÉRCHY
ATTILA KISS
GYÖRGY E. SZÖNYI

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Szeged 2012

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Eastern and Western Traditions of European Iconography

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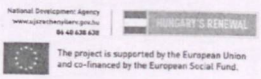

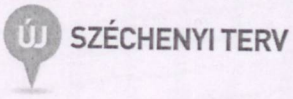

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Anna Kérchy

Disorder in the Museum

Recycling Waste and Cultural Trauma in the Chapman Brothers' Abject Art

Etymologically speaking, the word 'museum' originates from the Greek Mouseion *Μουσεῖον* referring to a temple dedicated to the worshipping of the Muses, mythical patron goddesses of arts and sources of supreme spiritual knowledge. The contemporary common sense attributed to the museum remains true to the origins by circumscribing a secluded, metaphorically 'sacred' space consecrated to the preservation and display of our most prestigious artefacts canonised as 'cultural fetishes' or 'historical relics' invested with a symbolical value that transcends their use or exchange value often to the extent of invaluableness and untouchability. Anyone well-enough socialised knows that paying a visit to the museum requires not only a healthy dose of curiosity but, as a pilgrimage to a privileged repository of civilisation, it necessitates the temporary adoption of certain codes of conduct including focalised attention, considerate behaviour, and disciplined attitude. In a traditional sense, the museum constitutes a liminal space with its distinct rules of functioning organised along the lines of order, cleanliness and respect. Artworks are arranged chronologically, thematically or by the artists' names, rooms are neatly mapped, explanatory brochures created, itineraries recommended, space kept under the constant surveillance of room-guards and safety cameras, cleanliness maintained through specialised technical apparatus, (temperature control preventing the formation of dust or humidity), and through the discipline of potentially polluting human bodies (prohibition to eat, drink or make noise in the exhibit halls). Interestingly, this naturalised museal attitude associated with a distantly respectful a-musement also surfaces in such marginal linguistic phenomenon as the slang term 'museum' denoting "a girl that's nice to look at, but impossible to get remotely intimate with," as the *Urban Dictionary* suggests. It is perhaps less surprising that the professional definition keeps the classic Horatian *dulce et utile* (entertainment and education) as the vital constituents in the formula of the museum defined by the 2007 Statute of the *International Council of Museums* as

> a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

However, on the other hand, as Michel Foucault convincingly argued, the museum is far from being a sterile and sanctified, Parnassus-like, safe sphere of certainties. In a Foucauldian view, the museum proves to be a *heterotopia*, a place contained within the society formative of its very foundation, yet also a curiously self-dislocating "counter-site" symbolically stretching outside or even beyond society by virtue of "simultaneously representing, contesting and inverting all the other real sites that can be found within the culture" (2002, 231). Museums are loci of spatial and temporal confusion, designating a new set of physical, psychic and topographical relations.

My paper wishes to explore precisely how the apparently sterile, symbolically sacred, and strictly *ordered* museum space becomes spectacularly invaded by the socially rejected, artistically reincorporated 'waste' of/in 'abject art' aimed to exercise a shock-therapeutical effect radically *disordering* the subject while fulfilling the communal responsibility of remembering what we would rather forget. I shall unveil the intensification of the museum's heterotopiac function, demon-

strating how the artistic recycling of our cultural imagination's Unimaginable traumatic residue (humanity and art degraded to worthless, abject waste) turns the exhibit hall into the canonised ordered (art)system's "constitutive outside," a liminal space apt to reveal the very impossibilities of representation.

As Foucault highlights, even if museums' location can be precisely indicated in the real world, they challenge our conception of space through pointing to an abstract "*outside* of all places" which they "reflect and speak about" (Foucault 2002, 231). A museum may juxtapose various different spaces, bridge geographical and cultural distances, combine microscopic and large-scale views, and fully restructure spaces with exhibits like the pyramid rebuilt brick by brick in one of Louvre museum's underground halls. The spatial reorganization of an exhibit has the capacity to activate different levels of meanings depending on how and where the visitor's attention is focused.

Foucault also calls museums "heterotopias of time" (234) which enclose in one single storehouse cultural remainders from all times, styles and places coined as historical heritage meant to condensate knowledges accumulated to be canonised throughout the ages. But they are also apt loci to freeze-frame History and point towards Eternity by virtue of the endless process of collection, the timeless value of works of art, and attempts made at preserving works against the raging ravages of time.

In a heterotopic spatio-temporal imbroglio, the museum's institutional setting allows for the intrusion of the past's 'residue' into the present's ordered system, by means of a 'cultural recycling' Walter Moser (2007) associates with "the dialectic and drama of remembering and forgetting". The museum undertakes an archaeological-anthropological project, whereby the apparently worthless can be recovered and reinterpreted as historically significant. Ruined, fragmented, disordered or the most mundane, low cultural objects, simply by virtue of their historicity, can gain a high cultural value that is reinforced by their exhibition in the museum space providing us the institutionalised standards of artistic readability. Socially rejected waste can become recuperated with time as a meaningful and valuable memento of the past. Museum-exhibits of the type of broken fishhook of a prehistorical man, or a chipped bit of medieval mural painting, a baroque chamber pot, but also mundane memorabilia with a literary historical significance such as a famous author's laundry list, or jewellery made from remnants of the World Trade Centre are esteemed for their aptitude to assure the (somewhat illusory because human-made) continuity of (art)history. Throughout the 'museal recycling' process, archaeological remains, ruins and rubbish are symbolically purified and invested with civilisational significance via the meticulous restoration, renovation, recuperation process. Accordingly, the museum fulfils its Foucauldian function as "heterotopia of ritual (or) purification" (235) by the cleanliness of art-objects, exhibit-spaces and visitors' physical, psychic, mental states alike. The museumgoer stops in front of the shiny glass cases looking for illumination, knowledge and delight by the displayed museal artefacts, and etches a sketch or has her photo taken in front of the artwork – traditionally dressed for the occasion in her Sunday's best, but surely with a knowing and proud smile – in remembrance of the culturally expected catharsis.

The museal space as a "heterotopia of illusion" (Foucault 2002, 235) proposes to expose and explain a variety of temporally or spatially distinct places. These might be in reality inaccessible but are offered for imaginary exploration by courtesy of the museum's also being a "heterotopia of compensation" able to create an "other place" (235), where fantasies can roam free, perspectives proliferated, and minds opened up to make sense and sensibility of the previously unknown. Emotive immersion and socio-cultural self-reflection fuse in the museal interpretive process. The visitor is interpellated as a historicised subject with a social responsibility to face passing time, and to recall within a meaningful narrative that which we would often prefer to forget: philosophically speaking, the fundamental trauma of the *homo moriens*, the very awareness of our own mortality.

The museum's role in establishing cultural knowledge, historical consciousness, communal memory, as well as social and artistic sensitivity gains even more stress when the drama of

remembering and forgetting is incited by rejected, mundane, seemingly insignificant objects origi-nating from culturally traumatic events which we would rather associate with the Unimaginable and the Unspeakable, while paradoxically expecting museums to commemorate them, "to provide a fairly detailed description of what is unspeakable".[1] In twentieth century Western cultural memo ry the most obvious example for such an event is the Holocaust from which very few objects have been left behind for museal display because of the all pervasive nature of programmed annihilation. Yet the remaining tangible traces of the past trauma – the heaps of victims' abandoned suitcases, shoes, prisoner uniforms, even prosthetic limbs and shorn human hair (Figure 1) – cannot be regarded otherwise as metonymically embodied mementos of the Unnameable Impossibility itself. They are equally associated with a moral prohibition and a compulsion to recall, to represent and to forget, and, thus, constitute an immense challenge when it comes to locating them in the museum's memorial space.

Figure 1: Human hair in display case at Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum. Photograph by Lukasz Trzcinski. 2009. ScrapbookPages. <http://www.scrapbookpages.com/-auschwitzscrapbook>

Julia Kristeva starts out precisely from this cognitive dissonance when in her *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection* she elaborates a corpusemiotical theory of the subject "abjectified" by the haunting return of a repressed, traumatic otherness that threatens with the collapse of identity and meaning alike, through its uncanny fusion of the homely familiar with the horrifically unthinkable. For Kristeva abjection is exemplified by the heap of children's shoes traditionally associated with infantile joys and Santa Claus' presents, now dislocated, abandoned in Auschwitz museum, as a trace of the senseless massacre, the depersonalising massgraves, and of the void left by them, a memento of the voiceless victims' unburied past. The piles of human hair in concentration camp memorials illustrate how the human bodily form reduced to waste, devalued as useless, disordering impurity, as flesh turned into corpse marks the abject's "elsewhere" "beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (Kristeva 1) summoning the breakdown of sane self and sense caused by the loss of distinction between order and disorder, visible and unimaginable, systemic inclusion and exclusion, "psychic expulsion and retention" (Moser 2007). Abject shocks us by evoking the primal, infantile sensation of our vulnerably corporeal materiality that is normally meant to be disciplined and protected by socialisation. However, here it is hideously transformed into a brutal experience of ravished terror at the sight of the insignificant, ie. non-interpretable body-waste immediately related to crisis states such as times of war, neurosis, perversion, illness, crime, and violence.

Following Kristeva's theoretical propositions, *abject art* gradually gains a canonised art historical status as an aesthetic category referring to the invasion of the symbolically sacred, sterile museum space by the traumatic residue of the socially rejected, artistically reincorporated 'waste' aimed to exercise a shock-therapeutical effect. The term was first used as the title of 1993 Whitney Museum, NY exhibit, *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire* gathering contemporary artists'

[1] Berel Lang uses this phrase describing the negative rhetoric of Holocaust representation. See Lang 2000 quoted in Richardson 2005.

selected works revolving around the theme of spectacularised otherness and body/waste-horror. The first Abject Art exhibit displayed disintegrating, fractured bodies like Cindy Sherman's androgynous medical-puppet-cum-sex-toy mannequin-torsos and Robert Gober's phantom-limb-like prosthetic leg, decomposing or dissected bodies like Helen Chadwick's neatly organized chunks of meat defamiliarised as a locus of self-identity, solid bodies turned inside out to reveal the hidden viscosity beneath the smooth skin-ego like Andres Serrano's photograph of a holy crucifix submerged in his own urine merging taboos, or Mary Kelly's postpartum documents analysing her baby's infantile faecal stains and feeding charts along with baby vests decorated with Lacan's intersubjectivity model and pre-linguistic semiotic alphabet. Spectators have been invited to re-evaluate their relation to the past (as the 'present's residue') and in particular to their past traumatic experiences of exclusion constitutive of their historical/narrative self-identities.

The Whitney Museum exhibit focused on the cultural repression and repulsion of the strangely embodied, non-symbolisable 'Unnameable' on an individual level, whereas my aim in the remaining part of this paper is to analyse the macrodynamics of abjection and the marginalisation or annihilation of scapegoated social other(ed)s on a collective level. I study perhaps the most cutting edge artists appearing in the 1993 NY temporary exhibit: Jake and Dinos Chapman, whose postmodern abject artwork characteristically treats emotionally and socio-politically challenging topics related to cultural trauma, social cataclysm and body/waste-horror.

Conceptual artist brothers Jake and Dinos Chapman, *enfants terribles* of the Young British Artists' heterogeneous movement have become infamous for their testing the limits of representation through transgressive themes elaborating on horrific, thanatological, anatomical and pornographic aspects of the grotesque. Their much debated œuvre contains odious oddities ranging from mannequins of children with genitalia instead of faces, to decaying corpses with skulls decorated by clown's noses familiar from joke shops, to drawings of mutant Ronald McDonalds and funny Hitlers, bronze sculptures of inflatable sex-toys and dog turds, and defaced high artwork meant to "rape creativity."[2]

Figure 2, 3: Scenes from *Fucking Hell* © Jake and Dinos Chapman. Photograph by dubow on *flickr*. 2007 Oct 19. Creative Commons License. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/dubow/2955028215/>

[2] *The Rape of Creativity* was the title of the Chapman Brothers' April-June 2003 solo show at Modern Art Oxford where they undertook to systematically 'deface' the mint collection of Francisco Goya's *Disasters of War* print-series.

Figure3.

In the followings, my aim is to argue that the Chapmans' most debated works spectacularise the Unimaginable, and stage the ultimate taboo by displaying sacred humanity and art reduced into abject waste. Their aim is to recycle cultural traumas' troubling residue in the heterotopiac museum space allowing for artistic revelations concerning the (im)possibilities of representation and the responsibility of fighting against traumatic amnesia through remembering.

The Chapman Brothers' 2008 *Fucking Hell* is a diorama-series of 5000 miniature wax figurines of Nazis and their victims displayed in ultra-violent scenes of torture, pain and death in a nightmarish Hieronymus Bosch-style, arranged in glass cases in the shape of a swastika. This is a sequel to their 1993 *Disasters of War* now on permanent exhibit in Tate Gallery, centrepiece of the Royal Academy's *Apocalypse* exhibition in 2000, and an extended remake of their 2000 installation *Hell* destroyed in the Momart warehouse fire in East London in 2004. The grotesquerie of the *Hell* sculpture results from the meticulous microscopic perspective forcing us to take a close look at demented frenzies of human violence and violated humans. (Figure 2, 3) Disclosed as documented historical facts, they let us become empathically and sympathically engaged with the most horrific events we would rather turn our eyes away from, or stare silently mesmerised at. In the Chapmans' words, the goal of "nasty art" (Chapmans 2008) is to make spectators conscious of the culturally stigmatised and suppressed nastiness of our existence, to provide an idea of the inconceivable Non-Being that is a necessary counterpart rendering meaningful our very Being. They help us imagine the dangerous, disordering, nonsensical "otherness"[3] that is always out of place and incorporated within the inside of the social/representational system (of individual lives' and collective History's meaningful narrative) only as its outside. The *Hell* exhibition is meant to provide a philosophical commentary on founding ambiguities of Western culture, ranging from religion's macrodynamic to psychology's microdynamic levels. As the Chapmans suggest, while Christianity's major commandment is the prohibition to kill, it is based on the murder of the son of God and "a voyeuristic identification of guilt" (Chapmans 2008). Similarly, conforming to the sacrificial, exclusionary logic of negativity governing our identity- and social constructions, we

[3] Anthropologist Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* discusses the same cultural gesture of "permanently thrusting aside [otherness] in order to live" (Kristeva 3).

Figure 4: The human body reduced to waste. Scene from *Fucking Hell* by Jake and Dinos Chapman. Photograph by dubow on *flickr*. Creative Commons License. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/dubow/2955872666/lightbox/>

"learn what we have in face of what someone else does not have" (Butler 3). Others' loss, vulnerability, and instability serve as negative reference points in determining limits of subjectivity, normality, visibility/speakability/readability. In fact, the anti-aesthetics of "nasty" abject art invading the cleanly museum space literally stages disorder as the basis of order, waste as the ground of purity, through foregrounding the liminal space of the abjected "constitutive outside" (Butler 3). Thus, what is disclosed is forgetting's share in remembering, and those uninhabitable, inarticulable, uncontrollable even inhuman zones of being which prove to constitute the "founding repudiation" (Butler 3) and the traumatic kernel of our socially organised subjectivites and memories.

Figure 5: Dehumanizing humanity. Scene from *Fucking Hell* by Jake and Dinos Chapman. Photograph by Marcin Lachowicz on *flickr*. Creative Commons License. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/dlp/5375360013/lightbox/>

Moments of non-being, near death/life experiences when the human being is utterly dehumanised (Figure 4, 5) can only be 'recycled' as repressed traumatic residue of a past deprived of the possibility of becoming future, as flashbacks of collective cultural memory one might (prefer to) not have ever seen. Yet we still retain an epistemophiliac, scopophiliac sensitivity about them due to the ethical, historical responsibility to commemorate that which is impossible to be appropriately remembered. Like in traumatic amnesia's combination of a desire and a reluctance to forget and remember, the patient/spectator faces insupportably violent somatic experiences of the past, whose psychic resolution begins with the repressed memory returning solely as a bodily sensation, with no visualising capacity, sequence or logic.

The Chapmans' Hell-sculpture faces us with abjection's crushing "weight of meaninglessness about which there is nothing insignificant", the "willed and terrible suspension of being" to which we react in a "twisted braid of affects and thought" (Kristeva 2, 4) surfacing in violent bodily reactions such as nauseous disgust, outraged horror, frustrated giggle, blushing, compensatory yawning, or tremulous excitement. In Kristeva's view, these gut-reactions are self-protective gestures willing to expel the "other" in order to re-constitute the imaginarily self-sufficient, ordered, 'safe' symbolic self's psycho-social/representational sphere. They function as primary safeguards protecting us from the defiling abject, to place and displace that which is 'not me'/'non-being' yet engulfs me at the border of my condition as a living being. (Kristeva 8)

The Chapmanian works' artistic quality is often questioned on grounds of abusively benefiting from the calculable nature of the corporeal gut-reactions when affronting spectators with shock-effects of tastelessness ranging from obscenity to sacrilege. Their trademark manipulative indecency is clearly summarised in critic Johann Hari's line: "The Chapman Brothers offer a kind of punk art that spits in your face, punches you in the stomach, and nicks your wallet while you are puking on the floor" (Hari 2007). The violent bodily unpleasure predominating over critical self-reflection[4] directly involves spectators in a co-authorial interpretive process paradoxically based on the creation of non-meaning, on the refusal to create meaning. We are all troubled on being invited to give sense to the gut-churning non-representable (ie. Non-being) perversively reinscribed into the socio-culturally sanctioned museum-space created to institutionally circumscribe a safe scopophilic-epistemophiliac regime, a canonised realm of what is worthwhile to be seen, known and enjoyed. Interestingly, the symbolisation-subverting 'presence' of non-being emerges not so much by virtue of representation on the canvas or sculpture surface but rather off-canvas or sculpture in the intimate space of body and/in/to art. Spectators think to reject consciously abjection's engulfment but cannot help approaching it via their corporeal reactions, through failing to enact the socially supported mental and bodily discipline of museum going behaviour and displaying our vulnerabilities in the exhibition hall, thus metaphorically 'polluting' mind, body and space alike. Abject art revalues the wasted, the residue and supplement (beyond all stories) as inspiration and turns "cultural suppression into subcultural artistic revelation".[5] Thus, we experience a literalisation of metaphors of the 1909 futurist manifesto calling museums "absurd abattoirs" and "cemeteries of empty exertion" doomed to be demolished (Ward 2008). By virtue of a complex dialectical dynamics it is not only the artwork that has to be protected from the spectator in the museum, but the spectator's integrity is just as much endangered by the artwork's provocative effects. (Chapman in O'Hagan 2006)

The choice of words *The New York Times*' art-review uses to describe the first abject art exhibition back in 1993 clearly reflects the ambiguity of the reception-process fusing "intelligent anger," "instinct for provocation," "provocation and theory," "exercise in *déjà vue*" (Cotter 1993) – contradictory aspects which make the appreciation of abject art displayed in the museum space particularly challenging. What I find most interesting here is that abject art does offer an exercise in *déjà vue*; though not necessarily in the sense used by the critic referring to spectator's boredom felt over the unsurprising routine of the tired counter-tradition. On the contrary, our emotionally-charged cognitive dissonance provokes an utter temporal confusion, whereby the psychically intense, troubling experience seems to have already happened previously someplace, sometime, somehow repeating itself; fusing a sense of familiarity with uncomfortable strangeness in the fashion of the Freudian uncanny. It is particularly ironic that the term *déjà vue*, literally meaning

[4] Interestingly, abject art's criticism almost never takes place on grounds of its theoretical over-investment that produces a meta-narrative criticism of the embededness within ideological, representational mechanisms.

[5] Jeff Persels and Russel Ganim use the expression in relation with the Bakhtinian carnivalesque grotesque (2004, xiii–xxi).

of postmodernist, self-reflective re-use. Unlike its material-technical equivalents, cultural recycling is not all about forgetting: despite the emergence of new meanings, a memory trace persists through time, and once reactivated, necessarily renders the historical nature of the process apparent, endowing spectators with the bifocal perspective of 'then' and 'now.' As Moser suggests, recycling can be compared to historically, discursively grounded practices of "parody, pastiche, collage, montage, epigonism, rewriting, remaking, sampling, reconversion, mixing" (Moser 2007) in so far as forgetting is revealed as an inevitable component of cultural memorial/representational practices. Another common denominator is creative activity's multiple authorship. The canvases of shiny hellish landscapes belong just as much to Hitler, as to the Chapmans, and us, since the accomplished artwork "falls of and away" from the creator onto its public as waste combining the most troubling residue of traumatic historical heritage and postmodern anti-aesthetics daring to exploit rubbish as a resource for communally responsible self-expression,[7] creating degenerate art the Nazis would have loathed.

Obviously, reactions to cultural, artistic recycling are contradictory. Some art historians are outraged by the Chapmans' "violating something much more sacred to the art world than the human body – another work of art."[8] However, James Smith, chief executive of the Holocaust Centre in Newark believes that painting over Hitler's original historical artefacts is "the most appropriate form of vandalism [ever] encountered" (Hoyle 2008). It signifies making a point about the past and its relation to the present through demystifying cultural cataclysms as merely all too human. Revealing Hitler's mediocrity as a painter illustrates that "it takes neither a genius nor a psychopath to organise genocide" (Hoyle 2008). Simultaneously, the museum-exhibit Art(ist) is dragged down from his tyrannical piedestal.

Undoubtedly, the smiling face doodles on Hitler's brushstrokes, like the earlier Lego-toy-figurine-like miniatures portrayed in *rigor mortis* of war scenes, use grotesque means to evoke the darkest moments of human History, collective cultural traumas we paradoxically simultaneously identify as Unspeakable and Unimaginable, yet compulsively try to re- and re-narrate for therapeutical and moral commemorative purposes. In my view, the Chapmans' projects attempt to provide an answer to Theodor Adorno's famous philosophical dilemma concerning the barbaric impossibility of producing poetry after Auschwitz on grounds of the irresolvable tension between ethics and aesthetics. (see Adorno 1967, 34 and Tiedemann 2003) Adornoian anxieties concerning post-Holocaust-art fear that means inherent in artistic creativity itself might transform the ultimate inhuman sin and the sinister memory of the genocide into a valuable cultural property apt to offer cathartic pathos, purification and relief through 'purging,' commodifying, neutralising the traumatic event as "representation as" (Richardson 2005), thus, in the long run, reproducing and validating the cultural values of the society generating the cataclysm. As Anna Richardson highlights, any artistic form of speaking up about the Holocaust runs the risk of turning the victims' pain into aesthetic pleasure and denigrating survivor testimonies. The stylised, ceremonial, figural-fictitious discursive convention associated with 'the Holocaust industry' hazards violently desecrating the dignified silence commemorating the dead, and displacing the fallen comrades' voicelessness that constitutes a phantom-presence in any representation willing to testify to the tragedy. Conforming to the early Adornoian logic, fictitious reformulations of the catastrophe – and especially excessive ones – can possibly lead to negations of real excesses of authentic violence by relating them to imaginative capacities of invented horrors (Richardson 2005). If not, the difficulty in acknowledging an immense cultural trauma as the Holocaust leads from initial repression to a growing fascination with sanitised – softened and sentimental or shocking and sensationalist – images spreading in popular cultural representations, which "affirm life rather

[7] As Moser quotes Jonathan Culler (1988, 179) "Trash has thus become an essential resource for modern art, and in a world of rubbish, art has learned to exploit rubbish."

[8] See Dorment (2003) on the Chapmans' defacing Goya.

than death, survival rather than destruction," individual kindness rather than majority tragedy, and even find the place for melodramatic happy endings to replace the "uncompromising horrors of reality" – as Susan Marshman (2005) suggests on analysing films like *Schindler's List* or *Life is Beautiful*.

However, as Richardson warns us, imposing a limit on Holocaust-representation may reproduce the oppression of free speech associated with Nazism. Despite our imaginative reluctance or resistance, and the impossibility of truthfully representing the extremely horrific presence that is meant to belong to the past, we feel a duty to testify by communicating messages of/about the victims, surviving and dead. The complexity of the post-traumatic amnesiac reactions challenging all interpretive activities on grounds of their unimaginability are reflected by the closing lines of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a Nobel-winning novel on the difficult experience and memory of slavery: "This is a story to pass on. This is not a story to pass on" (275). The same complexity is foregrounded in any museum exhibit dealing with residues of cultural memory, tackling the question how to tell a story that is never fully ours to tell. Despite Adorno's grim view of the 'museal' as an unpleasant display of "objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying" (Adorno 173 in Crane 327) the universal willingness to commemorate suffering experienced in order to possibly prevent suffering caused (Milton in Crane 329) naturally leads to the creation of memorial museums. They are referred to by a variety of names such as museums of human suffering, museums of remembrance, museums of human rights – all undertaking to make powerful statements against war and violence by documenting hardships encountered by people of different times and places (ranging from depicting pains of immigrants arriving on Ellis Island, mass violence of genocide in Armenia, Cambodia, or Croatia, or victimisations by socio-political conflict like in Ireland or the Gulag). (Duffy 117–22) By now, the question is "not *whether* but *how* [a cataclysm] should be represented" (Trezise 2001, 43 in Richardson 2005).

While the Chapmanian œuvre clearly evokes Adorno's argument on the failure of culture, on "all culture after Auschwitz, together with the urgent critique of culture (being) *garbage*,"[9] the impossibility of artistic creativity is by no means connected to its non-permissibility. The ambiguous, uncomfortable reactions provoked perfectly illustrate that the Chapmans' art has nothing to do with mass culture's pre-digested works condemned by Adorno for preventing individuals from thinking for themselves. The exhibit's cruel subtitle "The aim of all life is death" matching the hellscapes of Hitler's unimaginative canvases and the detailed miniature models of torture-scenes problematises the impossibility and necessity of remembering and forgetting at the conjunction of art, abjection and trauma. It addresses our culture's "compassion fatigue" and "pathos habit" resulting from viewers' "over-exposure to images of excessive violence" and the resulting demand for ever more violent scenes apt to feed our compassionate catharsis-dependence (Kent 2009). Moreover, it reflects on the ultimate travesty that in museums of remembrance victims remain known by their scattered belongings and not their spiritual works, while images of their deaths are meant to recall their lives (Young 1993 in Marshman 2005). The terrifying anti-aesthetics of death-images clearly subvert the classic artistic aims to transmit knowledge and entertainment, through illuminating that "reason wide awake can produce monsters"[10] (with reference to the systematicity of Nazi genocide) and that the bliss of the artistic sublime is drawn from a distanced contemplation of others' real suffering.

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[9] Adorno writes in *Negative Dialectics* 6:359: "The fact that it could happen in the midst of all the traditions of philosophy, art and the sciences with all their enlightenment, says more than just that these traditions and mind in general were unable to take hold of men and change them [...] all culture after Auschwitz, together with the urgent critique of culture, is garbage" quoted in Tiedemann, ed., xvi.

[10] As Hari (2007) suggests, this can be an allusion to the famous claim of Goya (defaced by the Chapmans) "the sleep of reason produces monsters."

However, instead of a safe glimpse here we get an overwhelming scream of horror. The show illustrates why Adorno himself retracts his initial claim twenty years later suggesting that "a perennial suffering has just as much right to find expression as a victim of torture has to scream" (Tiedemann xvi). And indeed, these artworks seem to break the silence of the museum space with a horrible laughter/laughter of horror characteristic of the grotesque. With Adorno, one can regard this as the bitter price every work of art has to pay that comes to life after/despite the total disillusion of/in humanity. Instead of trying to mimetically reflect, to re-present the Unspeakable historical trauma, having absorbed and transcended the aesthetics of pain and death in an Adornoian fashion, the Chapmans adopt a shock-therapy of carnivalesque familiar from the *dance macabre* of the *memento mori* tradition, while re-imagining the past from a post-modernist, self-ironic distance aware of its own very insufficiency.

Slavoj Žižek argues – in relation with Western world's (first) major twenty-first century cultural trauma, the September 11th 2001 terror attacks of the WTC towers – that the return of the repressed Real proves to be, on account of its traumatic/excessive character, impossible to be integrated into (what we experience as) reality. The traumatic kernel of the Real, (re)embodying the Unimaginable Impossible itself, compels us to experience it as a "nightmarish apparition," an "unreal spectre," a spectacular semblance that can be sustained only fictionalized, as a "reality transfunctionalized through fantasy." Fantasy's Janus-faced nature is revealed, its simultaneously pacifying through an imaginary scenario enabling us to endure an abysmal loss of constitutive of our subjectivity, and disturbing through its being inassimilable to reality. The effect of the Real indeed appears as an effect of the Irreal: in place of accepting the fictional product as real, we can only gain a grasp of the real turned impossible by recycling our (abortive) interpretive attempts at making sense of nightmarish fantasies. (Žižek 18–20) The Chapmanian œuvre's phantasmagorical scenarios of extreme hellscapes of suffering indubitably challenge rational discourse and mimetic representation as the ultimate basis of knowledge and question the significance of reasoned judgment throughout the process of (artistic) meaning-construction itself. Paradoxically, the "emphasis on non-knowledge, the irrational, foolish or absurd" (*Tate Liverpool* 2007) serves to violate spectators' subconscious resistance to knowledge. Shock-art is meant to turn our imaginative reluctance inside out, forcing all not to deny but recognise the imaginability and possibility of the Unimaginable and Impossible, as events which should be prevented from ever happening again.

Inspired by Adorno's recognition that it is precisely on accounts of the world having outlived its own demise that it needs art as its unconscious chronicle, they try to help us learn to live with our collective cultural traumas while taking precautions against their reoccurrence.[11] A trauma that cannot be properly remembered by no matter how realistic documentary, can be adequately commemorated and warned against via fantasy-work fuelled by non-knowledge, the nonsensical and the Impossible. The aim is not to understand but to know. As Primo Lévi puts it "perhaps one cannot, what is more must not, understand what happened, because to understand is to justify [...] If understanding is impossible, knowing is imperative, because what happened could happen again" (Levi 395–6 in Richardson 2005).

The Chapman Brothers as imaginative chroniclers of our times are often compared by critiques to the Brothers Grimm. (Campbell-Johnston 2008) However, their reimaginings of the historical past tackle serious ethical questions ranging from the human psyche's craving for the horrors along with the heavenly and the likelihood of our species' recreating hell had it ceased to

[11] In fact this historiographic metafictional play is reminiscent of the one adopted by Quentin Tarantino in his recent, 2009 WorldWar2 movie *Inglourious Basterds*, a blockbuster on accounts of having found the adequate means to speak the unspeakable in era of spectacularity and scepticism.

exist,[12] up to tendencies to look for the work's meaning in the artist's symptomatic traumas instead of our collective cultural malaise (Chapman in Hoyle 2008), questions of appropriation of authorship by rewriting (a particularly relevant question in the era of fanculture), and the lost belief in art's redeeming quality.

Through the Chapman brothers' 'creative vandalism,' disorder is interpreted as a means to maintain order, social status quo, and justice by virtue of an art that that does not lay claim to be labelled as Art. As cultural suppression becomes artistic revelation, as the waste-like traumatic remainder of cultural memory/amnesia is revalued as inspiration, in a multimedial metamorphoses, the exhibition hall fulfils the function of the psychoanalytician's couch, the courtroom of the post-structuralist subject-in-process/on-trial, the anatomical theatre, and the cabinet of curiosities. Artistic recycling conjures up ghosts embodied in the museum space to eventually share the effects of a religious confession, a judicial trial, a self-dissection and a spiritist séance, contributing to the spectator's difficult joys. Bringing to full realisation Foucault's ideal of the *heterotopia*, the museum becomes a space containing several places of/for the affirmation of difference, but also as a means of escape from authoritarianism, repression and inhumanity.

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[12] Ironically, as Dinos Chapman says in an interview, for their 2008 show the artists actually rebuilt a "newer, improved, bigger and brighter" version of *Hell* destroyed in Momart fire in 2004. See: O'Hagan 2006.

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